DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 415 984 PS 026 168

AUTHOR Martin, Margaret
TITLE Homeschooling: Parents' Reactions.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Attitudes; Elementary Secondary Education; *Home Schooling; Nontraditional Education; *Parent Attitudes; *Parents as Teachers; Socialization

ABSTRACT

Many people dissatisfied with the public school system are actively seeking alternatives to public education. In the past, the only alternatives to public school were parochial or private schools or privately hired tutors. Not everyone could afford these alternatives. Over the past 20 years, another alternative to public school education has come into being, namely home schooling. This paper provides an overview of home schooling and describes a survey of home schooling parents. The overview discusses the reasons parents home school, the curriculum, socialization issues, support groups, legal issues and requirements, and advantages and disadvantages of schooling at home. A survey of 12 home schooling parents from the Bronx (New York) and Manhattan (New York) showed that most had been home schooling for over 5 years and all had a college education. Reasons for home schooling included religion, opportunity for individualization, and ability to monitor closely children's learning and personal relationships. All chose their own curriculum, and most were not concerned with lack of socialization, believing that socialization at public schools is negative and preferring to provide other social opportunities for their children, such as community group involvement. All parents found home schooling to be a tremendous amount of work, and all used a local support group. On the whole, parents agreed that their children's reactions to home schooling were positive and appreciative. (Contains 11 references.) (EV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 415 984

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Homeschooling: Parents' Reactions

Margaret Martin

Abstract

Homeschooling is becoming a popular alternative to public school education. This article includes an overview of homeschooling including the reasons parents homeschool, curriculum, socialization of the children, support groups, and legal issues. Through a survey, homeschoolers revealed their reasons for homeschooling: religious reasons, lack of trust in the public schools, provision of a safe environment for their children conducive to learning, control over curriculum, and an opportunity to individualize the curriculum to meet the needs of their children.

As an educator, I have often been asked about homeschooling and had to admit that my knowledge regarding the topic was rather limited. Upon broaching the subject with my colleagues, I discovered that I was not alone in my ignorance. I decided to learn more about homeschooling by reading and discussing the various aspects of it with people who homeschool their children. This paper explores the various facets of homeschooling: reasons for homeschooling, the advantages, the disadvantages, state requirements, curriculum, and socialization. I wanted to develop a better understanding of what homeschooling is about so that my peers and the public, in general, could benefit from the information.

A growing number of people are very dissatisfied with the public school system and are looking for alternatives to public education. In the past, the only alternatives to public school education offered were parochial schools, private schools, and privately hired tutors. Not everyone can afford these alternatives. Over the past twenty years or so, another alternative to public school education has come into being, and that is, homeschooling.

PS 026168

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Margaret Martin
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

What is Homeschooling?

Some parents have become so disillusioned with the public school system that many of them are turning to homeschooling. It is one of the fastest growing trends in the United States. It is believed that "homeschooled children now number 1.2 million in the United States and the number is steadily growing" (Farris, 1997, p. 4). Ray (cited in Mirochinck & McIntyre, 1991), defines homeschooling as a "learning/teaching situation where children spend the majority of the conventional school day in or near their home in lieu of attendance at a conventional institution of education. Parents or guardians are the prime educators of their children" (p. 5).

Reasons for Homeschooling

Each family has its own value system and its own reasons for homeschooling. Dahm, however, states, "the stereotype is that most families homeschool for religious reasons. Religion, however, is only one of many reasons, other being issues of trust, educational quality, and special needs" (1996, p. 1). Other reasons include safety issues, such as overcrowding and drugs in the public schools, parents who want to discipline their children as they choose, and to avoid negative peer pressure.

For many homeschoolers, religion is often the prime reason for homeschooling. They feel "that their children do not obtain moral and ethical training much less religious values in America's public schools" (Pearson, 1996, p. 2). Homeschooling allows them to pass on their spiritual values to their children. It also "allows families to incorporate their personal religious beliefs and values into all areas of the curriculum. Handwriting

practice can incorporate Scriptures and reading can revolve around the Bible" (Dahm, 1996, p. 4).

Trust is another key reason why many parents choose to homeschool. "Parents do not trust schools to keep their children safe in a society that they see becoming increasingly violent and unhealthy. They worry that schools will teach conflicting values. They do not trust the schools to give their children the individual time and attention necessary to assure learning of basic rules" (Dahm, 1996, p. 4).

Some parents homeschool when they have a special needs student. They feel that they can give their child more attention at home and tailor their education to meet their needs. "They want to give their child an opportunity to learn at their own level without being labeled or embarrassed by comparisons to other students their age" (Dahm, 1996, p. 5).

Some parents decide to homeschool gifted students because they feel that their children are not getting enough attention in the public schools. Homeschooling "can give gifted students additional time to explore their academic interests and talents" (Dahm, 1996, p. 5).

Curriculum

What kind of curriculum do homeschoolers use? Many homeschoolers try to find and follow a curriculum of their choice. "The vast majority of homeschool parents handpick their instructional materials, custom-designing the curriculum to presumably suit the needs of their children, their family lifestyle, and applicable government regulations" (Farris, 1997, p. XXV). Many parents opt for the prepared curriculum.

"The advantages of using a prepared curriculum are that it will make the job of homeschooling easier and provide the assurance that you and your child are covering the subjects you want to cover and you are not wasting valuable time" (Blumenfeld, 1997, p. 43). "Prepared curricula usually comes with children's workbooks and parents' guides so that the parents can check the child's work" (Blumenfeld, 1997, p. 43).

There are "four basic sources for curriculum: 1) homeschool conventions, 2) homeschool magazines, 3) state and local homeschool groups, and 4) two excellent sets of books which give a great deal of information about curriculum" (Farris, 1997, p. 125). The best way for homeschoolers to find out what kind of curriculum is available is to attend a homeschool convention. These conventions offer a wide variety of materials. "There are prepared programs for just about every kind of family, religious and secular" (Blumenfeld, 1997, p. 43).

Socialization

What about socialization? This is a question most frequently asked of homeschoolers. Many feel that homeschooled children are isolated and miss out on interaction with other children; therefore, they do not develop needed social skills.

In public schools, children work together in groups. In these groups, children learn basic life skills such as working together, sharing, and showing respect for each other. Homeschoolers feel that "the only socialization children learn in public schools is the negative kind" (Blumenfeld, 1997, p. 74). They do not feel that their children are at a disadvantage. Homeschoolers, however, do realize that their children need to develop relationships with other children and adults. They go to great lengths to provide them

with opportunities to develop these relationships. "Most spend time with other children through support and networking groups, scouting, churches, and other associations. Many spend time with adults other than their parents through activities such as community volunteer work, home-based business, and tutoring or mentoring" (Lines, 1996, p. 66).

Support Groups

Support is very important when homeschooling. Homeschoolers often feel isolated. They often need reassurance that the decision they have made to homeschool is the right one. Having the support of family and friends is very important. "One of the great sources of moral support available to homeschoolers is the local support groups" (Blumenfeld, 1997, p. 95). At support group meetings, parents can discuss any problems they may have such as changing their curriculum and testing, or they can exchange information or just socialize. "The need for encouragement and fellowship is still a big, big reason why parents, especially mothers, are drawn into support groups" (Farris, 1997, p. 49). "The support groups also provide opportunities for homeschooled children to get to know one another, to play together, and to go on field trips together" (Blumenfeld, 1997, p. 96).

At these support group meetings, they also plan field trips, organize team sports and spelling bees. They organize art classes, gym classes, recitals, and many other activities. Support group members keep in touch through phone, fax, and newsletters. The best way to find a homeschooling support group in your area is to "contact the State

Homeschool Association which usually can direct you to a local support group" (Blumenfeld, 1997, p. 97).

State Organizations

State organizations are usually the best sources of information about what is going on in the state. "State organizations usually exist for the purpose of networking the local support groups, publishing a newsletter, sponsoring an annual convention, maintaining a presence at the state legislature, working on state legislation when needed, and disseminating legislative information" (Dorian & Tyler, 1996, p. 94).

National Organizations

National organizations are also a valuable source of support. They serve many functions. "Some organizations provide curriculum and correspondence courses while others provide legal services. Others provide a way for state leaders to network, while others maintain a presence on Capitol Hill" (Dorian & Tyler, 1996, p. 94).

Legal Issues

Homeschooling has always been a legal educational alternative. "Homeschooling is now legal in all 50 states" (Dorian & Tyler, 1996, p. 67). "Across the U.S. and Canada, there are varying allowances made for homeschoolers. Some states are very rigid and others are extremely flexible in cooperating to support homeschooling opportunities" (Bennett & Williamson, 1989, p. 3). "About three dozen states require homeschoolers to register with the local public school while five states require formal 'approval' from local school boards or superintendents" (Kennedy, 1995, Vol. 39, N. 8, p. 51). "In at least 14 states, homeschoolers may operate as private or church schools,

under private or church schools, or as alternative instruction programs" (Dorian & Tyler, 1996, p. 79).

If one plans on homeschooling, it is important to know the law and one's rights. It is advised that "you read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, including the Bill of Rights" (Dorian & Tyler, 1996, p. 76). It is also important to know the laws in your state concerning homeschooling. An invaluable resource is the Homeschool Legal Defense Association. "They will mail you out a synopsis of the law in your state free of charge" (Dorian & Tyler, 1996, p. 77). Another invaluable resource is your state homeschooling organization. "They should be able to acquaint you with the law in your state and put you in touch with a local support group in your area" (Dorian & Tyler, 1996, p. 77).

Qualifications for Homeschooling

The requirements needed to homeschool may vary from state to state. "Although many homeschoolers are indeed certified, the vast majority are not" (Gordon, 1987, p. 113). "Forty states do not require homeschool parents to have any specific qualifications, but eight states require a high school diploma or GED" (Dorian & Tyler, 1996, p. 79).

North Dakota and West Virginia have their own qualification requirements. "North Dakota requires the passage of a 'teacher's test' or a college diploma. West Virginia allows parents with a GED or high school diploma to teach until a child reaches high school. West Virginian parents must remain four years ahead of the student" (Dorian & Tyler, 1996, p. 79).

Attendance

All fifty states "have compulsory attendance laws. Most of these laws require children to attend school between the ages of 7 and 16. Some states require school entrance as early as age 5 or as late as the age of 8. Sometimes, the maximum age is as low as 14, while some states require attendance beyond age 16" (Gordon, 1987, p. 108). In most states, children are required to attend school the same number of days as public school children. The number varies from state to state. For instance, in New York State, children must attend school 180 days each year. Homeschoolers must "maintain attendance records (which must be made available for inspection upon request of the local superintendent), file with the local superintendent quarterly reports listing hours completed, material covered, and a grade or evaluation in each subject" (Farris, 1997, p. 189).

Assessment and Testing

Homeschoolers use many methods of assessing what their children have learned. Some use grades. Children can also demonstrate what they have learned through projects, papers, and performance. Others use a written evaluation. In many places, homeschoolers are required to have their children tested periodically with a standardized test. "Twenty-nine states require standardized testing or evaluation. Sixteen states require standardized testing. Thirteen states provide an alternative to testing. For example, Connecticut only requires a portfolio review" (Dorian & Tyler, 1996, p. 81).

Standardized tests are "designed to measure how well a student has mastered the material he has presumably been taught" (Bell, 1997, p. 34). Written evaluations are also

used by some states as a form of assessment. Written evaluations must be done by a certified teacher. Results of the standardized test or evaluation must be submitted to the superintendent.

In a portfolio assessment, "students are required to present a portfolio of their programs at the end of the year to an evaluator who writes a progress report. Both are then submitted to the school district" (Bell, 1997, p. 338). The portfolio is usually a three-ring binder filled with pictures and work from the school year.

The Advantages of Homeschooling

There are important advantages to homeschooling. Homeschoolers can provide a warm, nurturing environment in which their children can learn. "The atmosphere in the home will be one where learning is exciting, not painful" (Gorder, 1987, p. 88). "Parents won't categorize their kids, classifying them as 'slow learners' or other handicapping labels. Each child will be treated as an individual, not as a set of records. Grades will be less important than true learning" (Gorder, 1987, p. 88).

Individualized Education

Parents can devote all their time and attention to their children. Parents know their children best and know their strengths and weaknesses. "Parents can choose the amount of structure that is best for them and their children. Each program can be individualized to suit the needs and interests of each child. Each child can progress at his

own rate instead of at the rate of the group" (Gorder, 1987, p. 87). Parents are also able to evaluate their children on a daily basis and provide further instruction if needed.

Flexibility

Flexibility is a key advantage to homeschooling. Parents do not have to stick to a schedule, so children have more time to develop their talents and hobbies. Parents who homeschool can teach anywhere, so their classroom is not limited to the home. They can take trips during the school year, visit relatives, and take vacations. They can just pack up their books and go. "Learning is a year-round experience and the homeschool provides this. The continuum of experience is an important factor in learning and need not be interrupted by the calendar" (Gorder, 1987, p.88).

Curriculum

Another advantage of homeschooling is that it allows parents to choose their own curriculum. Parents can choose the curriculum that is best suited to the needs of their children. They can choose material that reflects their values and morals. "Homeschooling allows time for full exploration and mastery of the material" (Bell, 1997, p. 22). Homeschooling also "affords you the time you need to set and achieve academic standards" (Bell, 1997, p. 22).

Disadvantages of Homeschooling

Time

Homeschooling takes a tremendous amount of time and energy. Bell says, "Even though the actual time devoted to homeschooling your kids is far less than the time they

would spend in school each day, you still have lots of things to do to prepare for that instructional time" (1997, p. 30). Also, if you are homeschooling more than one child, the preparation time is doubled or tripled. In addition, every year there is a new course to plan for.

Limits of the Teacher

While discussing this topic with homeschoolers, it was agreed that they often feel inadequate because there is a subject that they do not feel qualified to teach, especially when the children reach the high school years. They said that they overcome this problem by hiring tutors or by team teaching. Bell states, "It is so important that we recognize our limitations and seek out opportunities for our kids to offset those limitations" (1997, p. 35).

Lack of Recognition

Homeschoolers that I have talked to agree that homeschooled children do very well academically, but their accomplishments often go unnoticed. Bell states, "Appropriate recognition is an important source of motivation for adults and children. And local homeschool communities are beginning to find creative ways to recognize the accomplishments of students in awards, banquets, exhibits at conventions, juried science and history fairs, and graduation ceremonies" (1997, p. 35).

The Survey

In order to find out more about homeschooling, I took a survey of twelve homeschoolers. The homeschoolers were from the Bronx and Manhattan. I knew one

homeschooler personally. Out of the twelve surveys sent out, ten responded. The names of the homeschooling families who participated in the survey will be kept confidential, or will be referred to by pseudonyms.

I found that most of the homeschoolers have been homeschooling for over five years. All homeschool two or more children. All of the homeschoolers surveyed have a college education.

Their reasons for homeschooling are varied. All mention religion either directly or indirectly as one of the reasons for homeschooling. Some other reasons given were low tuition, low student-teacher ratio, the opportunity to individualize teaching to meet the needs and learning styles of the children, the opportunity to monitor their learning and personal relationships closely, and the freedom to choose a curriculum suited to their needs. My research supports these findings. Dahm states, "The stereotype is that most families homeschool for religious reasons. Religion, however, is only one of many reasons, others being issues of trust, educational quality, and special needs" (1996, p. 1).

I found that all my homeschoolers chose their own curriculum. Again, the leaning was toward a curriculum that reflected their lifestyles and needs of the children. My research supported this. Farris states, "The vast majority of homeschool parents handpick their instructional material, custom-designing the curriculum to presumably suit the needs of their children, their family lifestyle, and applicable government regulations" (1997, p. XXV).

The question of socialization comes up frequently when homeschooling is discussed. One of the most frequent criticisms of homeschools is that children are

missing out socially. In fact, critics of homeschooling firmly believe that the only way that children learn social skills is at school. I found that homeschoolers, on a whole, are not concerned about the socialization of their children. They feel that any socialization in public school is negative. They go to great lengths to insure that their children are provided with many opportunities to interact with other children their own age. They plan trips with other homeschooled children. Their children are very involved in their churches and communities. My research supports these findings. Lines states, "Most spend time with other children through support and networking groups, scouting, churches, and other associates" (1996, p. 66).

There are many advantages to homeschooling. Again, the answers given by those surveyed were similar. Some of the advantages listed by homeschoolers are: homeschoolers have the opportunity to individualize the curriculum to meet the needs of the child, the children can learn at their own pace, more time can be spent with each child, children are not labeled "special ed.", one can teach one-on-one as needed, and one can monitor progress on a daily basis. My research substantiates these findings. Bell states, "Parents can choose the amount of structure that is best for them and their children. Each program can be individualized to suit the needs and interests of the child" (1997, p. 87).

The reaction to my question on the disadvantages of homeschooling was unanimous in that these parents find homeschooling to be exhausting and a lot of work. Women especially complained of this because they were the ones who usually did most of the homeschooling. One father who shared the teaching of his children felt that there

were no disadvantages to homeschooling. Only one homeschooler felt that the lack of science labs and materials were a disadvantage; however, she was the only one homeschooling high schoolers. She also felt that there was a need for organized sports. According to my research, the amount of time spent schooling and the preparation time were listed as the main disadvantages to homeschooling. Bell says, "Even though the actual time devoted to homeschooling your kids is far less than the time they would spend in school each day, you still have lots of things to do to prepare for that instructional time" (1997, p. 30).

I found that all homeschoolers surveyed used a local support group. All used the support group as a source of information. I had the opportunity to visit their support group. They were very supportive of each other. They organized trips for the coming month for all age groups. My research supports the fact that homeschoolers use their support group as a source of socialization for their children. Blumenfeld states, "The support group also provides opportunities for homeschooled children to get to know one another, to play together, and to go on field trips together" (1997, p. 96).

Homeschooler surveyed felt that the success of homeschooling depended on many factors. They felt that unity between parents was very important. "Homeschooling needs to be a joint decision" (Bell, 1997, p. 56). They felt that parental awareness of the individual child's needs, interests, strengths, and weaknesses was very important. The parents can then structure their teaching to meet those needs. My research supports this. "Parents can choose the amount of structure that is best for them and their children. Each

program can be individualized to suit the needs and interests of each child. Each child can progress at his own rate instead of at the rate of the group" (Gorder, 1987, p. 87).

On the whole, parents agreed that their children's reactions to homeschooling were positive and appreciative. They loved having Mom or Dad as teachers. One parent responded that out of 11 children homeschooled, only one had a negative reaction. She felt that this was because he missed organized sports. I did not find anything in the literature on children's reactions to homeschooling. The parents provided most of the comments on the children's reactions to homeschooling.

After reviewing the literature on homeschooling, I strongly feel that homeschooling is a viable alternative to public school education. Children are educated in a warm, nurturing environment by people who know them best—their parents. They know all about their needs, interests, and abilities. They can modify the curriculum to meet all of their needs. The children benefit greatly from the one-on-one instruction. Children are encouraged to work independently. They have time to pursue special interests and talents if they wish to do so. I had an opportunity to visit and observe a homeschooler teach. I was amazed at the amount of material covered in such a short period of time.

The biggest concern that critics have about homeschooling is the socialization of the child. I do not agree with this concern. Parents who homeschool realize that this can be a problem, so they go to great lengths to plan activities with other children and other homeschooled children. In fact, my daughter attended a girl's club arranged by a homeschooler which was also open to other children in the neighborhood. I happen to

know many children who are homeschooled. All of them are well adjusted, confident, and self-assured, something that you rarely see in public school children.

Homeschooling is a very taxing undertaking and, therefore, it is not for everyone. In order to be successful, I think that homeschoolers need to be prepared to make a serious commitment to the education of their children. Parents must agree that this is what they want for their children. They must be organized, willing to learn, and willing to accept their limitations. From talking to and observing homeschoolers, I found that all of them possess these qualifications. They are perfect examples of homeschooling at its best. They definitely prove that homeschooling can and does work.

References

Bell, Debra (1997). Ultimate Guide to Homeschooling. Nashville, London, Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Inc.

Bennett, Williams, & Kern (1989). Homeschooling: Answering Questions. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas.

Blumenfeld, Samuel L. (1997). Homeschooling: A Parent's Guide to Teaching Children. New Jersey: Citadel Press.

Dahm, Leslie (1996). Education at home with love from school. Educational Leadership, 54, 68-71.

Dorien, Terry & Tyler, Zan Peters (1996). Anyone Can Homeschool. Lafayette, Louisiana: Huntington House.

Farris, Michael (1997). The Future of Homeschooling. Washington, D.C.: Regency.

Gorder, Cheryl (1987). Homeschool: An Alternative. (Revised) Columbus, OH: Blue Bird.

Kennedy, John W. (1995). Homeschooling Grows Up. Christianity Today, 39, 50-52.

Lines, Patricia M. (1996). Homeschooling Comes of Age. Educational Leadership, 54, 63-67.

Mirochnik, Denise A; McIntire, Walter G. (1991). Homeschooling: Issues for Administrators. C.S. Maine University: Orono. Coll. of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 336 853)

Pearson, Richard C. (1996). Homeschooling and What Educators Should Know.

(ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 402 135)

END

U.S. Dept. of Education

Office of Educational
Research and Improvement (OERI)

ERIC

Date Filmed
July 15, 1998